

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
 INTERVIEW WITH BRYANT GUMBEL ON NBC-TV PROGRAM, "TODAY"
 PENTAGON
 AUGUST 23, 1994

BRYANT GUMBEL: On Close-up this morning, those Cuban refugees. As we've told you, they continue to take to the seas in record numbers. Once adrift, they are being picked up by Coast Guard and Navy vessels, then brought to the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, where they are being held indefinitely.

Defense Secretary William Perry is just back from touring the Guantanamo Bay since seeing the rescue operations first-hand. He's at the Pentagon. Mr. Secretary, good morning.

SEC. PERRY: Good morning, Bryant.

MR. GUMBEL: You went south to make a first-hand assessment of the rescue operations. What conclusions did you draw?

SEC. PERRY: First of all, it was unnerving to see all of the Cubans out on the boats, just drifting around in makeshift rafts. At one particular location, we saw more than 20 rafts floating around in the water with Coast Guard cutters and Navy boats steaming over to pick them up. It's a very dangerous operation for the Cubans and it's a very difficult operation which the Coast Guard and the Navy are performing, and performing very well, I might say. We also went on to Guantanamo and saw the preparations at the camps there for the Cubans, where the Cubans are being brought.

MR. GUMBEL: I know that you and other U.S. officials are going to great lengths to stress the danger of taking such a trip. But having said that, how confident are you that U.S. forces are rescuing all of those who do attempt to make the trip?

SEC. PERRY: We cannot be completely sure of that. We have found some empty rafts out on the open seas. We're not sure whether those empty rafts had Cubans in who went overboard or whether were empty rafts of Cubans who have been rescued but their rafts

have not been sunk. But it is dangerous and there's a real possibility that some of the Cubans are losing their lives.

The Coast Guard has a very determined search-and-rescue operation. They're doing a magnificent, professional job trying to save all of the Cubans that are out there.

MR. GUMBEL: Let's talk about Guantanamo. In addition to the Cubans, as I understand, you've got about 14,000 Haitians also being detained there. How concerned are you about the continued stability of the base?

SEC. PERRY: There are something over 14,000 Haitians there. We are setting up a separate camp for the Cubans. It's more than a mile from the Haitian camp on the other side of a large ridge so that the two camps are quite separate. We are putting in facilities to accommodate 10,000 Cubans there. We could put more than that, but our present plans are to put in the tent city to accommodate 10,000 Cubans.

The concern is not for the physical well-being of the people at the camp. It's just people at the camp have a very boring activity there and they're frustrating --

MR. GUMBEL: Given that, how much of a powder keg potentially is it, Mr. Secretary? You have over 14,000 Haitians being detained there. Ultimately you'll have about 10,000 Cubans being detained there, angry with their situation. You have about 7,000 U.S. forces there. Do you foresee increasing the number of U.S. troops there to maintain stability?

SEC. PERRY: We have adequate troops there to maintain the security. The problem is one of frustration for the people of the camp. When I was there yesterday, for example, there was a peaceful demonstration by the Haitians, who were obviously bored and frustrated. They would like to leave the camp and come to the United States. The best we can do in that regard is provide various kinds of recreation and education programs for them in camp, and we are doing that; we, the military, and also the U.N. has an organization there. And there are private relief organizations working on that as well.

MR. GUMBEL: You have noted that plans are being made to accommodate up to 10,000 refugees at Guantanamo. Beyond that, I believe you have made plans for another 5,000 or so to have safe-haven detention centers in neighboring islands. What happens, Mr. Secretary, when that capacity has been breached?

SEC. PERRY: We have -- besides what you have described there, there is the possibility of expanding Guantanamo further. There's also the possibility of moving a number of the refugees into Panama when the new government becomes established there. So there are many alternatives not yet explored, or not yet exploited. But the important message that I would have to the Cubans is to not take to sea in the boats. It's not only dangerous, but they will be ending up in Guantanamo, not in the United States. And it is basically a holding camp. It is not an attractive proposition for them.

MR. GUMBEL: Given the fact that Guantanamo is being used to detain refugees who are rescued at sea, are you at all concerned that its close proximity might encourage some Cubans to try to storm their way into it on land?

SEC. PERRY: That's always a matter of concern. That would be a very difficult and even more dangerous operation for Cubans than the sea.

MR. GUMBEL: Would you view them as aggressors or as people seeking refuge?

SEC. PERRY: They would be people taking a very dangerous step because there are two separate fences at Guantanamo, the U.S. fence and the Cuban fence. And between those two fences, there's no man's land between them. The Cubans have placed thousands of mines. So anybody that tries to cross those fences are going through a very dangerous minefield. And the message I would have to the Cubans is that that's really a dangerous undertaking, and we urge them not to do that.

MR. GUMBEL: There was, as you know, some talk of a naval blockade of Cuba. That has now been downsized a bit. What are your own thoughts about the viability of such a blockade or the need of one?

SEC. PERRY: Well, it is always an

option, of course, but it would be a much larger undertaking than anything that we are planning to do now. It would require putting naval ships all around the island. At the present time the fleet of Coast Guard and Navy ships we have up there is just in the area where the boat people have taken off, which is in the northwestern end of Cuba.

MR. GUMBEL: All right, Secretary William Perry. Thank you very much, sir.

SEC. PERRY: Thank you, Bryant.

MR. GUMBEL: Always a pleasure; much appreciated.